

Some Experiences of Lord Syfret.

BY ARABELLA KENEALY.

PRINCE RANJICATTERJEE'S VENGEANCE.

ILLUSTRATED BY R. SAVAGE.

CHAPTER I.

LORD and Lady Wycombe had been dining with me. They were new friends, or, to speak quite accurately, new acquaintance, for I never regard as my friend any man I have not known ten years. I have calculated to a nicety that period as being essential to sufficient oxidation of the social polish to enable one to judge of what metal a man is made.

Lord Wycombe had no social polish whatsoever. In dealing with him you at no time saw yourself brilliantly or flatteringly reflected. He was not even nickel-plated. He was pewter right through—from the mugginess of his outer person to the inner recesses of that purely physiological contrivance which served him for a heart. Indeed, I used to wonder by what manner of means its valves worked. Without doubt, they worked stiffly and occasionally “clicked.”

The Wycombes were in my neighbourhood for the first time since their marriage, and for the first time since that ceremony were dining with me. I had ceased long before this to speculate as to why women marry particular men, or why men marry particular women. When the Powers had fashioned our world, they detected in it the possibilities of an Eden. This being not at all their intention, they inspired man with the fatal expedient of marriage, whereby he should make the one act of his life into which he would inevitably crowd the greatest measure of folly—irrevocable, and Eden has since translated itself to some remote and inaccessible region of space.

The Wycombes were a signal example of the human discord tethered fast and for all time with lawyer's tape. After she had left us that evening we remained

long over our wine. Or, rather, he did: for I, with marked intention, sat with an empty glass before me.

Suddenly he broke out brutally: “You wouldn't suspect that woman of being a common thief!” His face was flushed, his hand unsteady. Before we began dinner he had already taken his quantum of wine.

We had been speaking of his wife. I could not pretend ignorance of that he meant.

“Nobody would suspect Lady Wycombe of any more serious crime than that of breaking hearts,” I answered tritely.

“Ah! These lovely creatures have a dashed sight more original sin in 'em than most people give 'em credit for. But I'm no fool. Never was. Before I was twenty I could give you most women's price—and calculated fine at that, even to the farthings.”

“I believe I could have done the same—though I will not answer for the farthings—at the same age,” I said. “Ten years later I was not quite so sure of my arithmetic. Now I have given up the practice altogether. To find the unknown quantity one requires certain data, and the difficulty of finding the difference between these in different women makes the calculation altogether too fatiguing, especially as it is pretty sure to come out wrong in the end.”

“Ah, you price 'em too high, I expect,” he said knowingly. “Now I never suffered from that.” He poured himself another glass of port. “Good wine,” he commented.

“And so you wouldn't suspect her charming ladyship of being a common thief. Now you're fond of stories, I hear——”

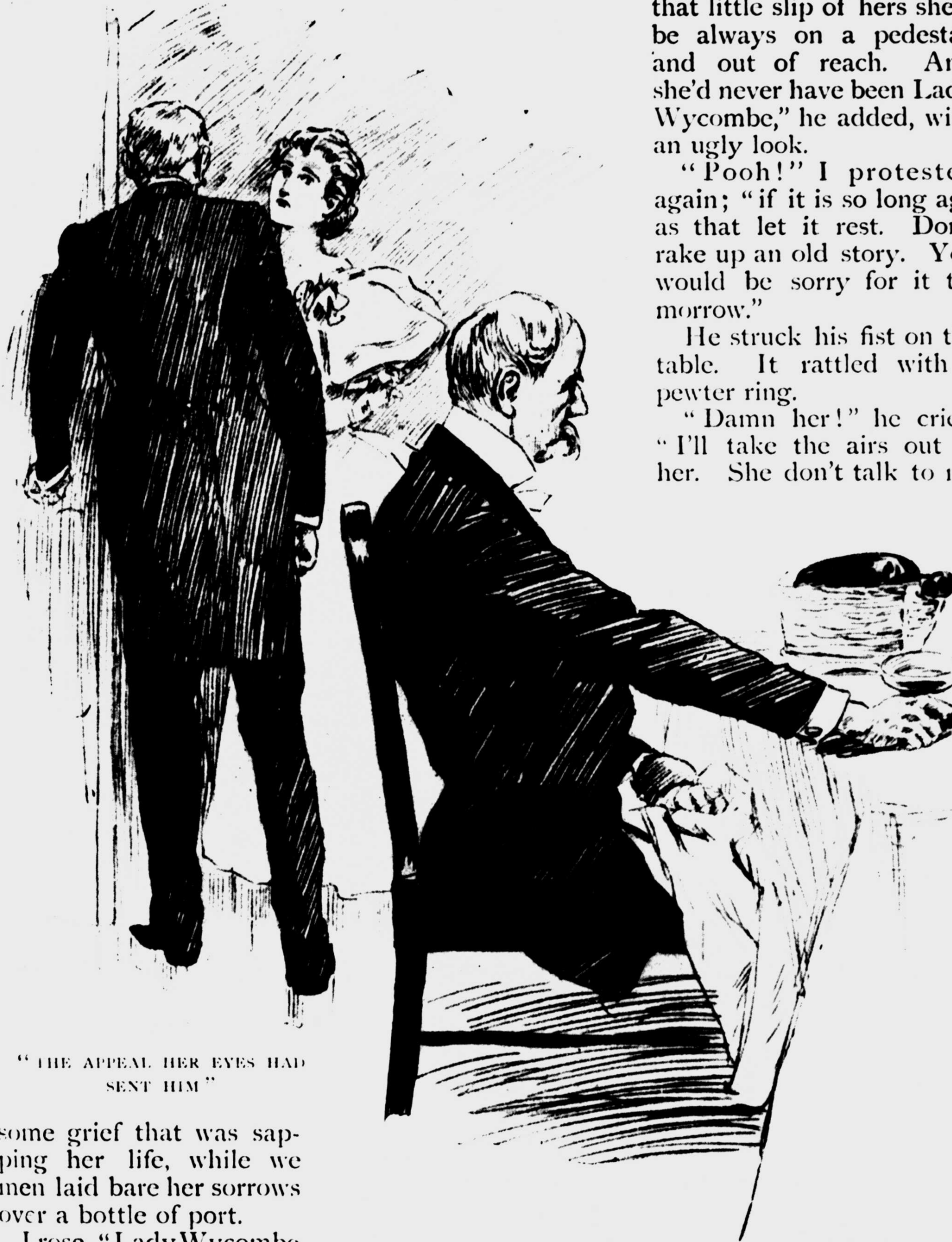
I pushed my plate of nutshells noisily before me. The pallid misery of a beautiful face was beside me again as it had been during dinner. I thought of her sitting upstairs alone but for

"though she thinks I do." (I remembered the haunting appeal her eyes had sent him over my shoulder as I held the door for her.) "You've got to keep the whip-hand of a woman—when she don't care about you. If it wasn't for that little slip of hers she'd be always on a pedestal, and out of reach. And she'd never have been Lady Wycombe," he added, with an ugly look.

"Pooh!" I protested again; "if it is so long ago as that let it rest. Don't rake up an old story. You would be sorry for it tomorrow."

He struck his fist on the table. It rattled with a pewter ring.

"Damn her!" he cried. "I'll take the airs out of her. She don't talk to me.



"THE APPEAL HER EYES HAD SENT HIM"

some grief that was sapping her life, while we men laid bare her sorrows over a bottle of port.

I rose. "Lady Wycombe is by herself," I said. "We must not leave her longer."

He stared. Then he filled his glass again. "By your leave," he laughed, "we'll finish this excellent bottle."

I had no alternative but to sit down again.

"I don't tell everyone," he began,

and look at me like she did with you to-night."

The brute was jealous. Heavens! And we had only been discussing some sanitary alterations she was planning for her cottagers, with a little hopeful eagerness.

"She was a Wells," he persisted, "a

familly of handsome girls with a gambling father. I was easy with him. He got more and more in my debt. I wanted her: she was the best-looking of 'em. But there was another man—some poor beggar of a diplomat—and she wouldn't look at me. I talked straight to Wells. I said, 'Look here, you know, she's got to have me or ——' well, he was mortgaged up to the hilt, and I was mortgagee. 'Well,' I said, 'you must talk it over with her.' I was fond of her—I'm fond of her now,' he interjected with bloodshot eyes." After a pause, during which he rolled my wine appreciatively on his tongue, he continued: "I knew how women sell their souls for diamonds. I sent her a magnificent necklace—a thing I'd picked up somewhere in the East"—he was silent for some minutes—"never seen such a thing," he resumed abruptly, "a rope of diamonds as big as beans, splendidly cut, and each set in the centre of four gold petals. It must have been worth at least ten thousand pounds. 'Put it round her neck,' I said, 'and take her to the glass, and tell her while she's admiring herself.' Well, I never saw the necklace again. Wells turned up next day with a long face, and the case, said he was deucedly sorry, but Miss Aline declined me at any price. Supposed things must take their course. I locked the case in my strong-room, like a fool, without looking at it. I instructed my lawyers. Just then, as luck would have it, somebody left the Wells a fortune, and I was paid in full. Wells sent a cheque and mentioned incidentally that Aline was shortly to marry her beggar. Now I might never have opened the necklace-case from that day to this, because I was not at all set on marrying, and Aline had given me a dose; but three days before that fixed for her wedding

something made me go to the safe and open the case."

"Well?" I questioned eagerly.

He tossed down the last glass of port. He turned his hot eyes on me. "So you're interested?" he said.

I made an effort. I rose. "I think we have finished our wine. Let us go upstairs."

He put a purple hand on mine. "By heaven," he cried, "you shall hear me out. When I opened the case——" he burst into a rough laugh. "What a fool I might have been: in two days she would have married the other man—when I opened the case——"

"There was nothing there," I broke in, and could immediately have bitten my tongue out.

"Oh, she was not so fresh," he said. "There was a string of metal beads with a brass enamelled clasp—worth, I should say, some couple of shillings—but heavy enough and capable of rattling so that the fraud might have been long undetected."

"Of course, it occurred to you her father took them?"

"I cleared that up. He wasn't that kind of man. He was dumbfounded. There was no mistake about it. He was like a madman. Offered to sell all he had to keep it quiet. Aline had taken charge of them that night."

"Where did she put them?"

"Locked the case up, so she said, with her other things. Took it out next morning and handed it to her father. She had guilt all over her when I confronted her. She didn't marry the beggar."

"Why did you marry her after such ——"

"Oh, I had never supposed her an angel," he said, coarsely, "and I wanted her."

CHAPTER II.

I WAS calling on Lady Wycombe. I had been able to give her some hints as to the new plans. When that look of fixed misery slipped out of her face she was a lovely woman. As I was leaving her manner changed. She hesitated. The hand in mine trembled. She raised a pair of appealing eyes.

"Lord Syfret," she said, "Henry has told me your kind—most chivalrous intention. I cannot thank you enough,

but, believe me, the very greatest kindness you can do me is to let the matter rest. It is five years, and, Heaven knows, I have suffered enough."

"Lord Wycombe should not have mentioned it. I asked him particularly not to do so. Only if I discovered the real culprit——"

She shrank before me. A hot flush rose in her cheeks.

"You believe me innocent?"

"The question needs no answer."

She dropped into a chair and covered her face with her hands. "For Heaven's sake, if you know what pity is, let the matter rest. Even should you clear me——" She broke off abruptly. Her manner made it evident that she knew something. "Even should you clear me——" I finished the sentence: "You would inculcate someone dearer." I do not approve of scapegoats, howsoever willing. Let each man take the blame due to him. "Lady Wycombe," I objected, "you know my hobby. You must please permit me to ride it on this occasion. I give you my word that should I discover anything—a remote possibility—I will not move a step nor say a word without first consulting you."

"Thank you," she faltered, "but your greatest kindness would be to discover nothing."

"Have you the metal beads?"

She lifted her head out of her hands.

"I have never seen them," she said simply.

Then perceiving the significance of her admission, "Please, please," she entreated, "let the matter rest; I can bear the blame."

On the stairs I met Wycombe. He scowled under his shaggy brows. He was jealous of any man who lifted hat to her.

"By-the-bye," I said coolly, "do you happen to have those metal beads you spoke of?"

"What the deuce should I keep such rubbish for?" he blurted bluntly. "I flung them out of window."

"Then you acted like a fool," I said as bluntly; "they were the chief clue to the thief."

Two days later I opened my *Times* with interest. I turned to the advertisement sheet. "I hope it has a prominent place," I reflected.

It had, and read as follows: "*A Thousand Pounds Reward*.—Anybody giving information which shall lead to the recovery of a certain diamond necklace of unique pattern, consisting of thirty-four large diamonds—each set in the centre of four beautifully-wrought gold petals, shall receive the above reward. Apply, &c."

And below this, another: "*Ten Pounds Reward*.—Any person who picked up, or has knowledge that will lead to the recovery of, a string of

metal beads lost outside a house in Eaton Square on or about the 10th of April, 1883, shall receive, on proving it to be the same, the above sum. Apply, &c."

"Now for bogus applicants," I mused, when I had found the advertisement duly published in the half-dozen papers to which I had ordered it to be sent. Then, "Good heavens!" I ejaculated. For immediately below my second advertisement I found the following: "*Four Thousands Pound Rewards* shall be given to any mans informing news to discover a diamond necklace composing of thirty-eight beautifully cut diamond dewdrops dropped in richly embossed golden tulip-flowers with four leaved. To be communicated with Somers, Grand Hotel, between ten and four."

Below this still another: "*Four Thousands Pound Rewards* shall be given to any mans informing news to discover a string of thirty-eight large beads in bluish-greys metal with octagonal clasp of gold enamel. To be communicated with Somers, Grand Hotel, between ten and four."

These advertisements I found in four of the papers in which mine appeared. I further learned that both had appeared every morning for the preceding week.

"So," I remonstrated with Wycombe on meeting him later at the club, "you have taken that matter of the diamonds out of my hands?"

He stared. "I am a little curious to know why you did not put your advertisement into intelligible English. Or were you the victim of an unlettered printer?"

"Perhaps you will explain what you are talking about," he said.

I took him to the reading-room. I showed him the advertisements. "Good Lord," he broke out, "why it's my necklace. The description is exact."

He assured me he had nothing to do with the advertisements. He had come to his conclusions long before. I thought he looked perturbed. He begged me to let the matter drop. But the chase had grown exciting. I took my hat. I jumped into a hansom, and was soon at the Grand Hotel. It was within seven minutes of four as I drove up.

"Is Mr. Somers in?" I inquired of the porter.

"Is it the advertisement, sir?"

"Yes"

"Ah, that's Prince Ranjichatterjee."

A little man with long white beard and Hebrew features slipped something out of his eager dirty fingers into those of the porter.

"Remember I wash first," he whispered. The coin was small. I cast a calculating eye over the shabby Jew. Sixpence I decided. I put a half-crown into the porter's other hand.

The Prince was in, I believed, giving him my card.

"This gentleman was first, my lord," the man responded, firmly, and passed the dirty Hebrew on to a page-boy.

"I am afraid your lordship is too late for his Highness," he added, civilly. "He sees nobody after four; and to-day's the last day. There's been about three hundred people to see him already." He tested between his teeth the coin the Jew had given him. It was a half-sovereign. I anathematised myself for a fool; Jews are not stingy when four thousand pounds are in the running. At that moment the Jew came hurrying back. His face was crest-fallen. The boy behind him grinned wide-mouthed. The Jew darted at the porter.

"Gif me back my 'alf soferings. The Prince not see me," he shrieked. The porter gazed benignly and unconsciously upon him from a height of six feet two.

"No, sir," he said, indulgently. "No ole clocs to-day."

The clock marked three minutes to the hour. "Take me to the Prince," I insisted.

There was some demur at the door. Then my card was sent in, and after a minute I was admitted to a room which had been Orientalised so far as were possible to a room in a London hotel. Divans and couches draped with magnificent rugs and luxuriously cushioned took the place of chairs. Hanging lanterns curiously wrought, and with panels of rich glass, shed a dim light. There was a heavy aromatic odour on the air.

In the middle of the room, with a table before him, sat a lithe, eager-looking man—a Hindoo. His eyes flashed toward me like two lamps. He returned my bow without rising, and waited for me to speak. Behind his chair four men stood like sombre shadows.

"I have the pleasure to address His Highness Prince Ranjichatterjee?" I began. He bowed again.

"You advertised I believe——"

The Prince extended a finger with a curious gliding stealth. Not a muscle of his face moved. I heard the distant "ting" of a bell. Immediately four other shadows seemed to start up from the floor noiselessly and like inanimate things. Two of them took up their stations at opposite doors of the room, at the same time folding the heavy wadded portieres well over these. I felt two steal up close behind me. Instinctively I had ceased speaking.

"I advertised——" the Prince suggested with a sinuous bend of his dark head.

"You advertised with regard to a diamond necklace. I also am seeking a diamond necklace——"

"You have lost a diamond necklace?" the Prince insinuated. I nodded. It was sufficient for his purpose.

His eyes emitted light. "The necklace I have seeking," he said, softly, "is unquietous. It do be consisting of thirty-eight diamonds."

"Ah!" I said, "the one I mean had only thirty-four."

He seemed taken aback.

Then a wily look stole into his face.

"It is not difficult to subtract four diamonds from thirty-eight."

"So then," I said, "you lost it first?"

He fixed his eyes expressionlessly on me. I felt the steamy breath of the men behind me unpleasantly hot on my neck.

Then the Prince observed suavely:

"In a world where the lady is half people, there is many necklaces."

"That is true, of course," I admitted, "but your necklace was composed of diamonds set in the centre of golden tulips, golden tulips with four leaves?"

"Tulips has five," he said, simply. "It be a mistake. The jeweller was his head chopped off." There was quite a sweet smile on his face as at the recollection of something delectable.

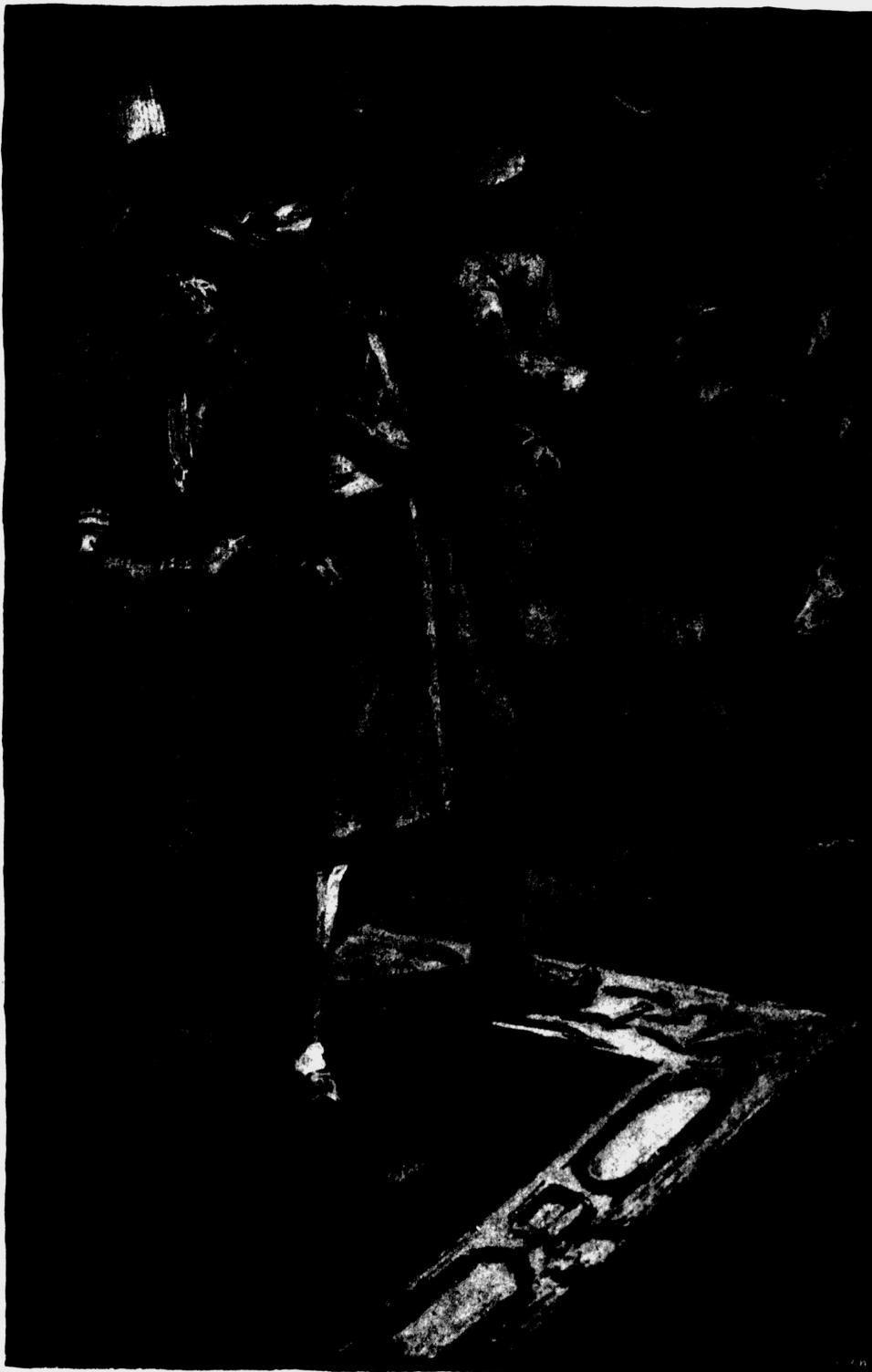
"Good gracious! is that how you do things?"

"We do things, so there is no more talk," he purred.

"Well, sir," I went on, "I should think there is not much doubt about it that your necklace and my necklace are one and the same. The four-leaved tulip settles it. There would not be two necklaces of so curious a pattern."

His face paled. His eyes seemed to go out.

"No," he said, almost inaudibly, "it



"BUT SHE WITHHELD HIM"

was my idea. She was the lovely dew-drop, the petals of my heart to enfold her."

"How did you lose it?" I questioned.

His eyes lit up again. His face got colour. He made a little motion with his hand.

"That you will tell me," he said, blandly.

Before I knew where I was I found myself gagged, upon my knees, with four men standing over me, and round my throat by some mysterious means, a bow-string drawn sufficiently tight to be somewhat more than an unpleasant hint.

CHAPTER III.

It sounds like a bit from an "Arabian Nights." At the moment, even above the consciousness that my life was not worth a minute's purchase—for there was no mistaking the grim sincerity of the Prince's face, nor the strictly business intention of the men about me—even at that moment I was conscious of a sense of the ludicrous. But there is an ugly feel about a bow-string, and the irrelevancy between it and my Bond Street collar soon ceased to amuse.

The Prince rose and came toward me noiselessly across the richly-carpeted floor. He spat before me. He struck me with a womanish feeble spitefulness on either cheek. Then he rubbed his long dark hands exultantly.

"So I be found you at last!" he said, with an evil chuckle. "I be found you at last, you robber of women."

His mood changed. He flung himself prone on the floor. He moaned, and writhed, and beat his clenched fists against the carpet. He struck his brows. "She is gone," he cried passionately, "my dewdrop, my pearl, my moon of the heavens. She is gone, and only it be with me to vengeance."

He continued in the same strain for some minutes, but the remainder of his lament was Hindi and unintelligible. He sobbed and gasped as though he had been a fractious child.

A woman stole in through a lifted curtain—a woman like a tawny tiger-lily, with wide full eyes deep-fringed and liquid, and a mouth like a scarlet flower. She glanced contemptuously at his grovelling figure, then moved toward it with the undulance of flowing water. She laid an ivory hand on either of his shoulders, and spoke to him in a foreign tongue. He rose with an abashed look; then, his eyes lighting on me, he made as if to renew his childish assault. But she withheld him, motioning him with a flash of her tropical eyes to his seat at the table. She took up

her place beside him, and for the first time, so far as I had seen, though I was aware she was conscious all the while of my presence, her dark glance fell on me. It was a long penetrating glance, and seemed to search my very soul. Then she stooped and whispered the Prince. He made a motion of his hand. The gag was removed from my mouth at the same time that one of the fellows beside me gave a warning tug to the string about my throat.

After a moment the Prince demanded in a voice of concentrated fury: "Was it from her you got the necklace?"

I shook my head. "The necklace has never been in my possession," I said. "You are making a mistake."

"Yet you have confessed you lost it," he insisted furiously.

"I have never seen it. I am seeking it for a friend who lost it five years since."

He scrutinised me fiercely. "Have you been once in Calcutta?"

"Never."

"Do you swear?"

"I swear."

The woman touched him questioningly on the shoulder. He evidently interpreted my words to her, for she scanned me narrowly. Then she stretched her hand toward the table. A bell "tinged." Immediately a swarthy negro entered. She directed his attention to me. He shook his head violently, mumbling something. He came towards me and carefully examined my face. Then he spread his hands with an emphatic repudiation, shook his head, and mumbled again. A question being put to him again, he shook his head. The Prince dismissed him. Then turning on me he demanded with sullen balked anger, "Who is your friend?"

"That," I said, feeling my tongue somewhat dry in my mouth, "I am not at liberty to tell."

A minute later I did, however. And

let any man feel his brain full and throbbing fit to burst with black blood, and his eyeballs force themselves between his lids like peas out of a pod, and I imagine he would have done the same. After all, I was not bound to take on myself Wycombe's responsibilities, supposing him to have incurred any in the affair, a suspicion I had no reason for entertaining. Certainly I did not suspect him of stealing diamonds; and in any case he need not be fool enough to put his head into such a noose as I had done. They slackened the string and dashed water into my face. After a time I got breath, and told what I knew of the matter. I was compelled to point out Wycombe's name in a *Peerage* which they laid before me. The Prince put an ominous angry-looking cross in red ink against it.

"And the lady?" he said.

He made a gesture of inquiry towards the face of the woman beside him.

"No," I said; "she is an English woman. She has never been to India. My friend had the necklace before he knew her."

"Among the women of his house is there a lady of my race?"

I could hardly remain serious. The notion of Lady Wycombe harbouring such a rival beneath her roof was so preposterous.

"My friend bought the necklace," I insisted. "A man of his wealth and position does not steal diamonds."

"Nor women?" he questioned, with an evil look.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Lord Wycombe assures me he bought the jewels in Calcutta. I have no doubt he will give you the name of the man from whom he bought them."

He motioned one of the men behind him. "Bring Lord Weekam here," he said imperiously. The man moved to the door.

"Prince Ranjichatterjee," I said, "you are, maybe, a powerful prince in your own country, and accustomed to be obeyed. But in England men do not go hither and thither at another man's

word. I warn you Lord Wycombe will not come."

He started up with clenched hands. "I shall make him!" he cried shrilly.

The woman cast some contemptuous epithet at him. With a spasm of uncontrollable rage he motioned one of the guards towards her. The man took two steps forward. She laid her scarlet lips back over her gleaming teeth, and pointed him with a scornful finger to his place again. Then she spoke low in the Prince's ear.

"Will you send a letter to your friend, asking he comes?" he demanded, petulantly.

"No," I replied, "I do not like your way of treating your guests."

Livid with rage, he interpreted my answer to her. I thought she glanced towards me with the suspicion of a smile. She addressed me, but her words were unintelligible. I bowed and shook my head.

"What will you do?" the Prince interpreted.

"I will do what I can to bring my friend here to-morrow," I replied.

"Do you swear by your God?"

"If you insist on it," I said. "I cannot be sure he will come, but I will do my best."

"And the lady?" he questioned, with flaring eyes.

"No," I said, "not the lady; she has nothing to do with it."

He lost his temper again. He could not tolerate the slightest check. Again the woman soothed him. I was sworn by half-a-dozen oaths to secrecy as to that which had occurred. I was put upon my honour. Then the bow-string was slipped up over my chin, with permission to leave.

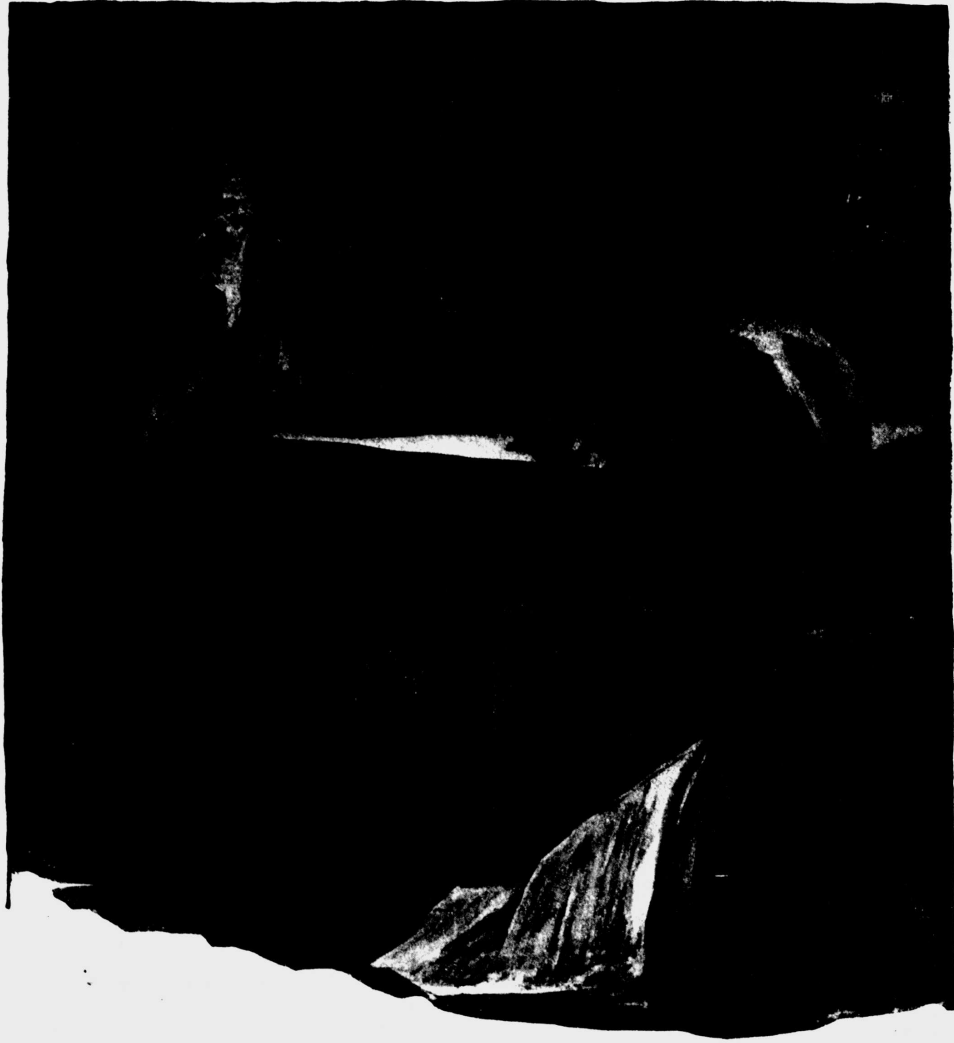
As I took myself down the hotel steps, where the Jew stood expostulating still with the blandly dissenting porter, I congratulated myself on an adventure the recollection of which would preserve me from boredom for many a long day, though all round my neck was a girdle of raw skin which my collar unpleasantly rasped.

CHAPTER IV.

"RANJICHATTERJEE! — the devil!" Wycombe ejaculated, with a curious change of expression.

"A near relative, assuredly," I agreed.

Why did his lips blanch? He lost his accustomed bluster. There was a strange, sudden stillness about him, as of a man meeting his fate.



"WHAT ARE THEY MADE OF?"

He saw my eyes on him. "I hate these Hindoo fellows," he blurted, drawing in his breath.

"You need only give him the name of the jeweller," I said.

"Oh! the name of the jeweller," he echoed stupidly. His mind was very much elsewhere.

He broke out suddenly: "Why the devil did you ever go into the thing at all? See what you've done, with your confounded meddling."

"Plainly," I said, "the necklace had a history before it came into Lady Wycombe's hands."

"I did as much for her as anybody would have done," he cried. "I didn't want her wretched necklace. I told her to take it with her."

"The jeweller's name is by no means all the information you will be able to give his Highness," I said, drily.

"His Highness will whistle a cursed time," he said, with that same stillness about him, "before he makes my acquaintance."

"Who was she?" I inquired.

"Oh, you can have the whole story. She was one of his—wives. The harem garden overlooked mine. She was a soft little creature, with eyes like moons and a little red mouth no good for anything but kissing—the kind a man gets tired of in a week. Of course, I got tired of her—dead, dead sick of her. But what could I do? She crept in one night with her hands running blood. He'd found out something, and, in a rage, had her

wretched little thumbs cut off. Of course, I had to take her in. There was a tremendous hue-and-cry. He's a great man out there, and she was his favourite wife. I kept her hidden as long as I was in Calcutta, and brought her as far as Bombay when I left. I couldn't bring her to England."

"What did you do with her?"

"I didn't do anything. I gave her money."

"She couldn't work without thumbs, poor creature."

"Oh, she couldn't work," he said. "Women like that don't work. I gave her money. She was pretty."

"And the necklace?"

For a time he would not speak. Then he said suddenly: "Oh, have the whole story if you like. She was a little fool. The night before I left she found she wasn't coming. She crept in and kissed my feet and hands and cried, and bent her head before me—the women there have different ways from our women, goodness knows—and next day I found she'd left her confounded necklace round my throat. I tried to trace her."

"Did she take the money?"

He got up blustering: "What the deuce does it matter. She would have if she'd had a grain of sense."

"Well," I said, "I don't think I should have mixed up a necklace with a history like that, in a love affair of any importance."

Later on he came to me with a sick face. "I'm off to Paris to-night. There's a beast of an Indian been following me about all day. These fellows stick at nothing. My life was attempted in Madras. Why the deuce did you rake up the affair again?"

"Why the deuce," I answered, "did you not tell me the truth in the beginning? Then I should have known there was excellent reason for letting it rest."

I called, next morning at the Grand.

"No, thank you," I responded to the porter's invitation to walk upstairs; "I will see his Highness in the public drawing-room."

I adjusted my shirt collar. That galled furrow round my throat rode on the edge of it as martyrs are said to have ridden on ploughshares. I chose a recess in which we might talk unobserved. The Prince came in presently, glancing about him with a haughty intolerance as though he expected the

several occupants of the room to salaam, and abjectly retire.

"So your friend—he sail away," he began maliciously.

"My friend had business which deprived him of the pleasure of meeting you this morning," I returned, with an uncomfortable sense that Wycombe had by no means got out of the wood when he booked for Paris.

"What he do with her?" he demanded feverishly.

I declined to say anything. I had no personal knowledge of the affair.

"I make him tell," he said with evil eyes.

I warned him that should anything happen to Wycombe, suspicion would fall on him.

"Pooh!" he said, "you have to prove. I no fool."

"By-the-bye," I urged, "I see you advertise for a string of metal beads, and strangely enough offer as large a reward for these as you do for the diamonds. What do you know about the metal beads?"

He scanned me curiously. Then he said with a significant smile: "Weekam, he shall tell you."

For the first time I felt a suspicion of Wycombe's good faith in the matter. Next morning I received a note from Lady Wycombe:

Dear Lord Syfret,—I shall be glad of your advice. Lord Wycombe is away. For the last few days the house has been watched and I have been followed by some curious-looking foreigners. As I left the carriage two evenings ago, one put his face close up to mine, examining me as if for some purpose, and my maid last night found my bedroom door locked. She ran downstairs for help, and on returning she and some of the men found my jewels lying about the room. Nothing had been stolen—I suppose the thieves were frightened and left hurriedly.

I drove at once to Piccadilly. The house was in the hands of the police. Lady Wycombe looked very much alarmed. She held an open letter in her hand. "It is strange," she said, "but they write from the Towers (the Wycombe's country house) that similar dark foreigners have been haunting the place, peering inquisitively into the women-servants' faces, and asking questions in the village."

"Heavens!" thought I, "I have indeed brought a hornet's nest about my friends."

I reassured her, at the same time keeping my own counsel. I knew well enough no danger threatened her. They were but seeking the Hindoo woman and the necklace. I called again next morning. I was shown into Wycombe's library. "I will tell her ladyship," the footman said. Then he blurted an apology, for her ladyship was already there—her ladyship confronting a tall distinguished-looking man, who stood over her with angry eyes.

"And you dismissed me on so pitiful a lie!" I heard him say as the door opened.

I had met the man some evenings earlier at a reception given by one of the Embassies. He had but lately returned from abroad. In a moment I made up my mind that this was the "beggary diplomat" Lady Wycombe had been within three days of marrying.

We exchanged bows. "Lord Syfret," he said at once, "I hear from Lady Wycombe that you are moving in the matter of a certain diamond necklace. I shall be infinitely obliged if you will transfer the matter to me. I have good right indeed, for it appears I am under suspicion of having stolen it."

She made a gesture of protest.

"Oh, how cruel you are!" she cried, under her breath. "I have never said a word."

"It should give you some pleasure," I said, formally, "to take the suspicion on yourself. Lady Wycombe has borne it long enough."

"Lady Wycombe," he echoed. "Aline, has anybody dared——"

She burst out in tears.

He bent above her prone head. "That, then," he said, tenderly, "is the reason for your miserable face?"

"No, no," she whispered. "I could have borne that if—if I could have kept my faith in you."

"And this is a woman's faith," he said, bitterly, "to take the man she was within a few hours of marrying for a common thief—to dismiss him without a chance of clearing himself, and to marry another man within six weeks."

"What could I do?" she faltered. "You were with me that evening. You

unclasped the necklace with your own hands and put it in the case. The case was returned to Lord Wycombe next day. Father himself returned it. When Lord Wycombe opened it there was nothing but a string of beads. He threatened proceedings. I knew you were poor. Forgive me—oh, forgive me—I thought it would be discovered, and I—I married him."

"It was a trick on his part"—he began.

"I think not," I said. "Wycombe was certainly sincere about it. He believes honestly to this day that Lady Wycombe stole the jewels. The mystery goes deeper than that."

I took him aside. I told him all the circumstances.

"Why did Ranjichatterjee advertise for a string of metal beads in connection with the diamonds?" I asked.

"We will find out from himself," he said.

But the Prince had only a tissue of Oriental lies to tell us.

"The diamonds, they were charmed," he said, turning his wily looks from one to the other of us. "On the throat of the disloyal wife the dew-drops be lose their crystal lustre and become as mere dross till they be charmed again. The *yogi* jeweller I threaten him with death if he make me not such a necklace, so I keep my women's hearts my own. Seven times the charm it worked, and seven times I rid the world of the disloyal wives."

"He is only laughing at us with his *yogi* rubbish," Redvers said, indignantly.

"Your friend, Lord Wycombe, be he well?" Ranjichatterjee queried, guilelessly, as we departed.

But it appeared our friend, Lord Wycombe, was not well, for Lady Wycombe met us with a telegram.

"Henry is very ill," she said. "I am starting immediately for Paris."

I travelled with her, leaving Ranjichatterjee to Redvers.

But we were too late: Lord Wycombe had been found dead in his room that morning, from what cause was never discovered. There was evidence neither of violence nor poison. Redvers and I kept our suspicions to ourselves, for Ranjichatterjee disappeared within ten minutes of our leaving him.

CHAPTER V.

It will be remembered that in advertising I offered a reward of ten pounds for a certain string of metal beads which could be proven to have been picked up in Eaton Square on or about a certain date—the date on which Wycombe had furiously flung it from his window. I had begun to doubt his good faith in the matter, when one morning there was

"The rewardish was not enough to pay a toiler for ish trouble," he retorted, slily.

"You thought the fool who offered a reward so large for a thing so worthless must require it badly, and would offer more?" I said.

He grinned. I was evidently a person of intelligence. "Oh, they are very good



"INSTANTLY THERE WAS A DAZZLE OF LIGHT"

ushered into my room the little old Jew I had previously encountered at the Grand Hotel. I recognised him in a moment.

"There wash ten guineas offered in reward for a shtring of beads?" he began.

"Ten pounds."

"Oh, shay ten guineas for a poor ole man," he insinuated, with a detestable leer.

"Not a penny more than I have said. Why did you not come before?"

beadsh," he said, heartily. "My little grandschild—my dear little grandschild pick them up in Eaton Shquare. I take great care of them since."

"I suppose round the grandchild's neck," I said.

"What it matter?" he replied, distinctly abashed. "It do no harm if she wears them shjust a little. She very careful."

"Where are they?"

He produced cautiously from the shabbiest of leathern bags a paper parcel,

which, unfolded, proved to contain a string of blue-grey beads of a curious metallic lustre. I counted them. There were thirty-four. I thought them strangely heavy.

"What are they made of?" I inquired.

"Foreign metal," he said; "very good foreign metal. I do not know."

"You will have to prove your granddaughter picked them up in Eaton Square on or about the date specified."

"Yes, I shee her," he said glibly, "and my wife she shee her."

"Ah," I said, "I shall want some other evidence than that."

He burst into tears. He protested that his word was as the Gospel. I had been mechanically slipping the beads from one hand to the other. Suddenly I dropped them into my pocket. I took ten pounds from my desk. "Well," I said, "I will take your word for it. I believe these are the beads." I put the note into his dirty hands.

He looked up cunningly into my face. "You very glad," he said; "your hand shake bad—your voice change. Gif poor man some more—a little more because he take such very good care of that you prize so much."

"Not a cent," I protested, controlling my voice; "but if you send your grand-

child here to-morrow I will give her a five-pound note for herself."

* * * *

Lady Wycombe and Redvers were to be married the following day. Her year of conventional mourning was up.

"Let me present you with a second wedding-present," I said nonchalantly, calling on her that evening. Redvers was on the point of bidding her good-night.

"What trick or double-dyed generosity is this?" he asked. He was looking well pleased into her lovely eyes. Then—

"Good heavens, Syfret! why don't you let that story drop. One is weary of the name of metal beads."

"Permit me," I said. I clasped them round her throat. In doing so I pressed a spring in the enamelled clasp.

Instantly there was a dazzle of light. The soft electric lamps sent sudden challenging and interchanging gleams across the room to where a focus of prismatic radiance played in parti-coloured flame about her. For her throat was strung by a string of four-leaved golden tulips, and from the yellow cup of each a magnificent diamond blazed.

Ranjichatterjee's *yogi* jeweller had practised a slight deception on his princely master.

